

Muhammad: Prophet, Avatar, Buddha, Zoroaster, and the Last Shaman

A Linguistic, Structural-Semantic, Philological, and Anthropological Approach

Jayanantaka

Humanity has always produced holy humans who occupy the threshold between the ordinary and the transcendent. Muhammad ibn Abdullah (570–632 CE) is recognized in Islamic tradition as the final Prophet (*al-Nabi al-Khatam*). Yet, when analyzed through a cross-cultural and structural-linguistic lens, he can also be understood as part of a universal archive of sacred humans, structurally comparable to the Avatar in Hinduism, the Buddha in Indian traditions, Zarathustra in Zoroastrianism, and the figure of the last Shaman in indigenous shamanic traditions. This approach situates Muhammad not only as a historical figure but as a universal anthropological symbol, expressed differently across languages and cultures.

Muhammad as Prophet

The Arabic word *nabi* derives from the root *n-b-*, meaning “to announce” or “to convey” divine revelation¹. Linguistically, this positions Muhammad as a mediator between humanity and the divine. He received revelation through the Angel Gabriel and transmitted laws, ethical guidance, and spiritual teachings to humanity. Structurally, the Prophet occupies the central position in the semiotic system that connects the human and the transcendent, serving as a moral and spiritual reference point for his community.

Muhammad as Avatar

In Hindu cosmology, an *Avatar* signifies “the descent of the divine into the world” to restore dharma or cosmic balance². From a linguistic and anthropological perspective, Muhammad can be understood as a “moral and social Avatar”: his presence restored ethical and social order in 7th-century Arabia, a society marked by conflict and injustice. The Sanskrit term *avatar* emphasizes descent and manifestation in the human realm, analogous to Muhammad as the bearer of divine guidance who establishes justice and universal ethics.

Muhammad as Buddha

The term Buddha comes from the Sanskrit/Pāli root *budh*, “to awaken” or “to be aware,” signifying an individual who attains enlightenment and guides others toward liberation from suffering³. Muhammad underwent deep spiritual contemplation in the Cave of Hira before receiving revelation, a transformative process marking profound moral and ethical consciousness. Structurally, Muhammad occupies a position similar to Buddha: guiding people from ignorance and suffering toward the truth, though through the medium of divine revelation rather than meditative awakening.

Muhammad as Zoroaster

Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, is the founder of ethical monotheism, emphasizing moral responsibility and the distinction between good and evil⁴. Muhammad shares essential features: emphasizing tawhid (the oneness of God), justice, and moral accountability. Semantically, both the Prophet and Zoroaster function as signs mediating moral and cosmic order, differing primarily in terminology and cultural cosmology.

Muhammad as the Last Shaman

A Shaman mediates between spiritual and human realms, often undertaking ecstatic journeys to acquire knowledge and heal communities⁵. In Islamic tradition, the Isra' and Mi'raj—the Night Journey and Ascension—can be interpreted as a cosmological journey analogous to shamanic travel: ascending to the heavens, receiving divine knowledge, and returning to guide the community. Thus, Muhammad also fulfills the role of the last Shaman, connecting humanity with the transcendent definitively.

Structural and Functional Similarities

A structural-semantics and linguistic-anthropology analysis shows that Muhammad, Avatar, Buddha, Zoroaster, and Shamans share a core universal function:

1. Mediator between humans and the transcendent
2. Bearer of ethical and moral guidance for their communities
3. Restorer of social and cosmic order according to cultural principles
4. Model of the ideal human, guiding behavior and spiritual orientation

The main differences lie in medium, language, and cosmological metaphor. Prophets deliver revelation, Buddhas teach awakening, Avatars incarnate divine principles, Shamans travel cosmological layers, and Philosophers reason toward universal truths. Muhammad integrates all these functions: revelation, moral guidance, restoration of order, and the ultimate symbol of the sacred human.

Through a philological, structural-linguistic, and anthropological lens, Muhammad can thus be read as the final expression of the universal sacred human archetype: a figure bridging the human and the transcendent, shaped by Arab culture, yet structurally aligned with global sacred traditions.

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Footnotes

1. Izutsu, Toshihiko. *God and Man in the Qur'an*, section on *nubuwwa*. ↩
2. Bryant, Edwin. *The Yoga Tradition*, chapter on Avatars. ↩
3. Gethin, Rupert. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. ↩
4. Boyce, Mary. *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. ↩
5. Eliade, Mircea. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. ↩